Problem-Solving Tips

The following guide was created to assist COPS grantees in their efforts to reduce crime and disorder through problem-solving partnerships. It may be reproduced and distributed.

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For more information about COPS grants, call the U.S. Department of Justice Response Center at 1-800-421-6770.

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How to Use This Guide

This publication can aid you in completing an application for a COPS School-Based Partnerships grant. It provides background on most of the questions in the grant application. Several passages are repeated directly from the application, but most of the information presented here is new.

This publication also may be useful to policing agencies and community groups that are not applying for grant funds under this program area but wish to enhance their problem-solving partnership efforts.

The Problem-Solving Approach

Traditionally, police have handled each incident or call for service as a separate and fairly unique occurrence. For example, most commercial burglaries have been addressed individually: an officer has taken a report from the victim and attempted to identify the offender and recover stolen property. The responding officer might have also counseled the victim in general crime prevention techniques and attempted to link a series of commercial burglaries to one offender. But the incidents have not typically been analyzed as a group to learn why and how the crimes have occurred repeatedly, and how they could have been prevented.

This grant program seeks to build on the problem-solving approaches many communities have used in recent years. These approaches involve analyzing groups of related incidents that comprise a specific crime problem, so that comprehensive, tailored strategies to prevent future crime can be developed. These problem-solving strategies rely less on arresting offenders and more on developing long-term ways to deflect offenders, protect likely victims and make crime locations less conducive to problem behaviors.

The emphasis on problem solving as an effective policing strategy stems from pioneering work on problem-oriented policing done by Herman Goldstein in the late 1970s and from experiments in the early 1980s in Madison, Wisconsin; Baltimore County, Maryland; and Newport News, Virginia. In Newport News, police practitioners, working in concert with researchers and community members, demonstrated that crime and disorder problems could be significantly reduced by implementing tailored responses directly linked to the findings of comprehensive problem analyses. Police and community members in Newport News were able to reduce burglaries in a targeted apartment complex by 34 percent, reduce prostitution-related robberies in the target district by 39 percent, and reduce thefts from vehicles in two downtown areas by over 50 percent.[1] From this effort and other early work on problem-oriented

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policing, community policing advocates recognized the effectiveness of the problem-solving approach and incorporated it into the community policing philosophy.

Since the mid-1980s, communities of all sizes and policing agencies of all types — including sheriffs' departments, state police, highway patrols and transit police — have successfully used the problem-solving approach to address an endless variety of problems. From these efforts, it has become clear that problem solving is critical to the success of community policing efforts. Initiatives that lack an analytical component often improve police-community relations but frequently have little impact on specific crime and disorder problems.

Repeat Problems

Taking a problem-solving approach to addressing a specific crime problem calls for a broad inquiry into the nature of the particular problem. As part of that inquiry, many police-community problem-solving teams have found it useful to analyze the patterns of repeat calls relating to specific victims, locations and offenders. Research has shown that a relatively small number of locations and offenders are involved in a relatively large amount of crime. Similarly, a small number of victims account for a relatively large amount of victimization. For example, researchers have found that more than 60 percent of calls for service in some areas come from only 10 percent of the locations.[2] According to one study, approximately 50 percent of crime victims in England had experienced repeat victimization, and 4 percent of victims, the "chronically victimized," accounted for 44 percent of all the reported crime.[3]

Research shows that a small number of victims account for a relatively large amount of victimization.

A large city in the Southwest United States also found that repeat victims — in this case commercial establishments — accounted for a disproportionate number of burglaries in the jurisdiction. In this city, 8 percent of businesses were burglarized two or more times during the course of one year and accounted for at least 22 percent of all business burglaries. In Gainesville, Florida, this pattern was repeated. Going back five years, police found that 45 of the 47 convenience stores in the city had been robbed at least once between 1981 and 1986, but that half had been robbed five or more times, and several had been robbed at least 10 times.

Community Involvement in Problem-Solving Efforts

Engaging the community without problem solving provides no meaningful service to the public. Problem solving without [partnerships] risks overlooking the most pressing community concerns. Thus the partnership between police departments and the communities they service is essential for implementing a successful program in community policing.[4]

Community leaders, researchers and police officials recognize the need for a strong, well-articulated role for community members in community policing efforts. They know that the police alone cannot substantially impact crime and advocate for the community as a full partner in preventing and responding to problems. Community involvement is an integral part of any long-term, problem-solving strategy. At the most basic level, the community provides policing agencies with invaluable information on both the problems of concern to them and the nature of those problems. Community involvement also helps ensure that policing agencies concentrate on the appropriate issues in a manner that will create support. In addition, collaborative work involving

police and community members provides the community with insight into the police perspective on specific crime and disorder problems.

Traditionally, community involvement in crime prevention and reduction efforts has been limited to serving as the "eyes and ears" for police or helping implement responses. The collaborative problem-solving approach allows for much greater and more substantive roles for community members. For example, students in a high school with a drug use problem on school grounds might survey their peers to determine the extent of the problem and also help design responses to the problem.

The SARA Model: A Useful Tool

As part of the problem-oriented policing project in Newport News, officers worked with researchers to develop a problem-solving model that could be used to address any crime or disorder problem. The result was the SARA model, which has four stages: Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment. These stages are discussed in greater detail below. Since the mid-1980s, many officers have used the SARA model to guide their problem-solving efforts. Although the SARA model is not the only way to approach problem solving, it can serve as a helpful tool.

Identifying and Selecting a Problem (Scanning)

A problem can be defined as:

- A cluster of similar, related or recurring incidents rather than a single incident; a substantive community concern; [or] a unit of police business;[5]

- A type of behavior (loitering, theft of autos); a place (Pinecrest Shopping Mall); a person or persons (a repeat perpetrator of domestic violence, repeat burglary victims); or a special event or time (an annual parade, payday robberies). A problem also may be a combination of any of the above;[6] and

- Informally, a problem can be thought of as two or more incidents similar in one or more ways that is of concern to the police and a problem for the community.

Methods of Identifying Problems

Problems may come to your attention in a variety of ways. These include:

- Routinely analyzing calls for service, crime incident data and other agency records for patterns and trends involving repeat locations, victims and offenders. (Police agencies may need to look at calls going back six months to a year to get an accurate picture of repeat calls for some types of problems.);

- Mapping specific crimes according to time of day, proximity to certain locations and other similar factors;

- Consulting officers, police supervisors, detectives, midlevel managers and command staff;

- Reviewing police reports;

- Surveying community residents, business owners, elected officials or students;

- Reviewing citizen complaints and letters;

- Participating in community meetings;

- Reviewing information from neighborhood associations and nonprofit organizations (local and national);

- Consulting social service and governmental agencies; and

- Following media coverage and editorials.

A problem can be thought of as two or more incidents similar in one or more ways that is of concern to the police and a problem for the community.

Selecting a Problem

It is important that both community members and police have input into prioritizing problems once they have been identified. Often, the problems of concern to community members are somewhat different from what the police expect. Consulting community members about their priorities not only ensures that community concerns are addressed but enhances the problem-solving effort at every step of the process. Citizen input can be solicited in a number of ways, including surveys, community meetings and focus groups (e.g., a group of students or a cross-section of neighborhood residents). Police input into the selection of a problem is also very important, because the police have expertise and information about problems that citizens do not typically possess.

In selecting a problem on which to focus from among the many problems your

community faces, you may want to consider the following factors:[7]

- The impact of the problem on the community — its size and costs;
- The presence of any life-threatening conditions;
- Community interest and degree of support likely to exist for both the inquiry and subsequent recommendations;
- The potential threat to constitutional rights — as may occur when citizens take steps to limit the use of the public way, limit access to facilities, or curtail freedom of speech and assembly;
- The degree to which the problem adversely affects relationships between the police and the community;
- The interest of rank-and-file officers in the problem and the degree of support for addressing it;
- The concreteness of the problem, given the frustration associated with exploring vague, amorphous complaints; and
- The potential that exploration is likely to lead to some progress in dealing with the problem.

It is important that citizens and police both help prioritize problems once they have been identified.

Redefining the Problem

Once a problem has been selected, it may need to be redefined as more information about the problem comes to light. This is to be expected. The frequent need to redefine a problem is one of the reasons we do not expect you to propose responses or solutions to the problem you select at this point in time.

The COPS Office will provide you with flexibility to redefine the problem you have selected and head in a new direction, if necessary. If your proposed project or focus should change significantly post-award, we only ask that you discuss the developments with your grant advisor or send us a note indicating the proposed change(s).

Identifying Stakeholders for the Selected Problem

Stakeholders are private and public organizations, types or groups of people (senior citizens, homeowners, merchants, etc.) that will benefit if the problem is addressed or may experience negative consequences (injuries, lack of services, loss of revenue, increased enforcement, etc.) if the problem is not addressed. Stakeholders may include:

- Local social service and government agencies with jurisdiction over the problem or an interest in an aspect of the problem;
- Victims of the problem, associations representing victims;
- Neighbors, coworkers, friends and relatives of victims, neighborhood residents affected by the problem;
- Agencies or people that have some control over offenders (parents, relatives, friends, school officials, probation and parole, building management, etc.);
- Commercial establishments adversely impacted by the crime or disorder problem; and
- National organizations or trade associations with an interest in the problem (Students Against Drunk Driving for an underage drinking problem).

You should identify as many stakeholders as possible for the problem you select. Each stakeholder may bring different knowledge and different leverage for impacting the problem to the effort. The more stakeholders that are identified, the more resources you will have to address the problem.

However, some communities have found that the problem-solving effort progresses most efficiently if only two or three stakeholders — a core group — work on the problem throughout the project. Other, more peripheral, stakeholders often have something to contribute at specific stages of the project, but not throughout the entire effort.

Following is a brief description of a sample problem and a listing of potential stakeholders and partners.

Sample Problem (Robbery, Fear)

A mid-sized eastern city of 35,000, with a relatively low crime rate, had experienced a series of robberies of food delivery people. On average, one delivery person had been robbed per month. A number of pizza and other fast-food stores refused to deliver to a mostly low-income and predominantly black neighborhood where many of the robberies were perceived to be taking place. Restaurant representatives said that stores decided not to deliver food to the area because an increasing number of delivery people had been attacked on the job, and they feared making deliveries in high-crime areas. A resident of the neighborhood where deliveries were not being made complained about the lack of delivery service and started a petition to change the policy. The city council began considering a proposal to require delivery to all residents, regardless of their location, and the story was covered in local and regional newspapers.

Stakeholders

(In addition to the policing agency)

- Potential home-delivery customers in "no delivery" neighborhood, signers of petition.
- Fast food delivery people.
- Fast food restaurant management (local franchises).
- National fast food delivery chains.
- National Restaurant Association.
- Local NAACP chapter.
- Local legislators.
- Local media.

Analyzing the Selected Problem

Why Analysis is Important

Comprehensively analyzing a problem is critical to the success of a problem-solving effort. Effective, tailor-made responses cannot be developed unless you know what is causing the problem.

Yet, many people essentially skip the analysis phase of the SARA model. The reasons for this are varied, but include the following: the nature of the problem sometimes falsely appears obvious at first glance; there may be tremendous internal and external pressure to solve the problem immediately; the pressure of responding to calls does not seem to allow time for detailed inquiries into the nature of the problem; investigating or researching the problem does not seem like "real" police work; and supervisors may not value analytical work that takes up time but does not produce arrests, traffic citations or other similar traditional measures of police work. Also, in many communities, a strong commitment to the old way of viewing and handling problems prevents police and citizens from looking at those problems in new and different ways.

Comprehensively analyzing a problem is critical to the success of a problem-solving effort.

Despite these pressures and perceptions, problem solvers must resist the urge to skip the analysis phase, or they risk addressing a problem that doesn't exist and/or implementing solutions that are ineffective in the long run.

For example, computer-aided dispatch data in one southeastern police department indicated that there was a large auto theft problem at a local shopping mall. Yet, after a sergeant reviewed incident reports and follow-up records on cancellations, it became clear to him that many of the reported auto thefts were actually cases in which shoppers had misplaced their cars and then mistakenly reported them stolen. If he had not analyzed the problem, the first instinct of the sergeant probably would have been to implement an auto theft prevention effort, which would have had little or no impact on the misplaced car problem. After analyzing the problem, it was obvious that the auto theft problem was not as large as it had appeared, and what was needed was a combination of a tailored auto theft prevention effort and better marking and distinction of the mall parking lots.

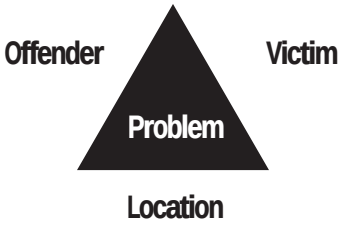
Problem solvers must resist the urge to skip the analysis phase, or they risk addressing a problem that doesn't exist or implementing ineffective solutions.

Asking the Right Questions

[The] first step in analysis is to determine what information is needed. This should be a broad inquiry, uninhibited by past perspectives; questions should be asked whether or not answers can be obtained. The openness and persistent probing associated with such an inquiry are not unlike the approach that a seasoned and highly regarded detective would take to solve a puzzling crime: reaching out in all directions, digging deeply, asking the right questions. Invited to participate in such an exercise, groups of experienced police personnel will pose a wide range of appropriate questions. They also will acknowledge that, except for some hunches, they usually do not have the answers to the questions they pose.[8]

Crime Triangle

*Generally, three elements are required to constitute a crime in the community: an **offender**, a **victim**, and a **crime scene** or location.[9] Problem solvers have found it useful in understanding a problem to visualize a link between these three elements by drawing a triangle.*



As part of the analysis phase, it is important to find out as much as possible about all three legs of the triangle. One way to start is by asking Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? and Why not? about each leg of the triangle. [10]

Victims

It is important to focus on the victim side of the triangle. As mentioned earlier, recent research has shown that a small number of victims account for a large amount of crime incidents. In addition, researchers in England found that victims of burglary, domestic violence and other crimes are likely to be revictimized very soon after the first victimization — often within a month or two. [11, 12] Effective interventions targeted at repeat victims can significantly reduce crime.

Effective interventions targeted at repeat victims can significantly reduce crime.

For example, according to one study of residential burglary in the Huddersfield Division of the West Yorkshire Police in England, victims were four times more likely than non-victims to be victimized again, and most repeat burglaries occurred within six weeks of the first. Consequently, the Huddersfield Division developed a tailored, three-tiered response to repeat burglary victims, based on the number of times their homes had been burglarized. According to initial reports, residential burglary has been reduced more than 20 percent since the project began, and they have experienced no displacement.[13] In fact, commercial burglaries in the area also were reduced, even though that problem was not being targeted. The police did, however, experience difficulties identifying repeat victims, because their database systems were not designed for this type of inquiry.

Offenders

A fresh look at the offender side of the triangle is critical to a problem-solving effort. In the past, much emphasis has been placed on identifying and apprehending offenders. While this can reduce a specific crime problem, particularly if the apprehended offenders account for a large share of the problem, the reduction is often temporary, as new offenders replace the original offenders.

The problem of replacement offenders is particularly acute in money-making activities such as drug sales, burglary, robbery, prostitution, etc. For this reason, policing agencies have found it helpful to learn more about why offenders are attracted to certain victims and places, what specifically they gain by offending, and what, if anything, could prevent or reduce their rates of offending.

Crime Environment

It is equally important to analyze the location side of the triangle. As mentioned earlier, certain locations account for a significant amount of all criminal activity. An analysis of these locations may indicate

why they are so conducive to a particular crime and point to ways in which they can be altered to inhibit offenders and protect victims. For example, placing ATM machines inside bank lobbies may reduce the amount of information an offender has about victims (that they actually collected money from the bank, that they put their money in their left-front pocket) and reduce the vulnerability of victims who have their backs turned to potential offenders while using ATM machines.

Guardians

There are people or things that can exercise control over each side of the triangle, so that crime is less likely. They are called guardians. For instance, if the crime problem is drug dealing in a house on Main Street and the offender side of the triangle consists of the dealers and the buyers, then a list of guardians would include the landlord, city codes, health department, tax department, nuisance abatement statute, neighbors, police, parents of dealers/buyers, probation and parole, department of traffic or parking enforcement agency, "No Parking Anytime" signs, and "No Stopping Anytime" signs. Analyzing the problem will help you determine which guardians would be most effective, and which in turn, will help you in developing responses to the problem.[14]

Sample Questions for Analyzing Problems

The grant application requests that applicants make a list of questions about the nature of the problem that need to be answered before new and effective responses can be developed. Specifically, the grant application requires a listing of questions about victims, the crime location and offenders.

Following are 16 sample questions about the robbery problem described earlier in the "Identifying Stakeholders" section of this guide (p 6).

Victims

1. Who were the victims (age, race, gender)? For whom were they working? What was the nature of the attacks?

2. What time of day were the victims attacked?

3. Have any food delivery people been attacked more than once? Have the food delivery people from certain restaurants been attacked more often than others?

4. How fearful are the delivery people? What areas are they afraid of? Do they have any suggestions on ways to make their job safer? Are they issued any security devices or provided with safety training?

5. What have other jurisdictions facing similar problems done to increase the safety of food delivery people? What policies have been the most effective and why?

Crime Location/Environment

6. Where are the robberies taking place — at the delivery site, en route to the delivery site, or near the fast-food establishment? How closely do the places of attack conform to the areas where delivery people will not go?

7. Of the robberies that take place away from the fast-food establishment, what is the distribution of places in which the robberies have occurred (apartment buildings, townhouses, detached houses, public or assisted housing, hotels, parking lots, office buildings, etc.)?

8. Are the delivery people robbed near their vehicle or away from it? What type of vehicle do the delivery people drive? Is it identified as a fast-food delivery vehicle?

9. Where is the food store located in relation to the "non-delivery" neighborhood? What routes do delivery people take to deliver the food?

10. Are there any environmental similarities in the specific locations of the robberies (lighting, shrubbery, isolated or blind areas)?

Offenders

11. What is the method of attack? Are any patterns evident? What weapons have been used and in how many attacks?

12. How do the offenders select their victims? What makes some victims more attractive than others? What makes non-victims less attractive?

13. Are the offenders placing orders to lure delivery people to them or randomly meeting up with their victims? If the offenders are placing orders to rob delivery people, are the orders being placed in the name of real customers or under false names?

14. How much money did offenders steal during a typical incident? Was anything else stolen?

15. Do the offenders live in the neighborhood(s) where the robberies are occurring? If so, are they known to residents who might have some influence over them?

(For additional information on analyzing problems, see chapter seven of Problem-Oriented Policing, by Herman Goldstein, and chapter five of Neighborhood-Oriented Policing in Rural Communities, published by the U.S. Department of Justice. A full reference list can be found on p. 23.)

Resources that Can Help You Analyze Problems

A number of tools can assist you in capturing data and other information about crime and disorder problems.

- **Crime analysts.** Crime analysts can provide officers with a great deal of assistance in collecting and analyzing data and other information about specific crime and disorder problems.

- **Crime analysis/report-writing software.** This type of software can help policing agencies collect, retrieve and analyze information about problems. In particular, it should be able to quickly and easily help users identify repeat calls for service relating to specific victims, locations and offenders.

- **Mapping/geographic information systems.** These systems can illuminate patterns, help identify problem areas, and show potential links between crime hot spots and other types of establishments (ATM machines, liquor stores, etc.).

- **Technical assistance.** Criminal justice practitioners who specialize in using problem solving to address specific crime problems — such as homicide, robbery, street-level drug dealing, etc. — can provide valuable assistance to policing agencies and community members. In addition, non-criminal justice personnel with backgrounds in a variety of areas can also aid in problem-solving efforts. For example, an archi-

tect may be able to help assess the risks of crime relating to the design of a housing complex, and a mental health expert may be able to assist in assessing a community's current response to people with mental illness and help improve that response. After grant awards have been made, a COPS Office contractor will provide grantees requesting assistance with referrals to individuals and organizations that can provide assistance in various areas.

- **Resident/business surveys.** These surveys can help police and community-based entities identify and analyze problems, gauge fear levels, identify preferred responses, and determine the real and perceived effectiveness of problem-solving efforts. These surveys also can help determine general and repeat victimization rates, particularly for underreported, low-level crimes.

Systematic and structured interviews with victims and offenders can provide important insights into the dynamics of a particular crime problem.

- **Crime environment surveys.** These instruments can help policing agencies and community-based entities systematically assess the physical environment of problem locations and the ways in which the specific characteristics of the locations lend themselves to crime and disorder.

- **Interviews with victims and offenders.** Systematic and structured interviews with victims and offenders can provide important insights into the dynamics of a particular crime problem. For example, offender interviews conducted with street robbers in one locality provided police with important information regarding the nature of victim selection and other aspects of the crime that could be used to prevent future victimizations.

- **Systems for tracking repeat victimization.** Data on repeat victimization can help communities identify those victims that account for a disproportionate number of victimizations and provide a focus for scarce resources. In some communities, such systems may need to be developed; in others, database upgrades or enhancements would be necessary to track repeat victimization.

- **Training.** Problem-solving training, with an emphasis on analysis, can help police and citizens build and enhance problem-solving skills.

- **Laptop computers/mobile data computers.** When housed in patrol cars, the latest generation of laptop computers can provide officers with direct access to useful and timely crime data and the ability to analyze crime problems and produce maps while on patrol.

- **Modems/online services.** Using online legal and business research services, police personnel and community members can quickly learn who owns property that has become a haven for drug sales, identify pending legislation and current laws affecting a particular crime problem, and review news coverage from communities facing similar problems. Similarly, police personnel and community members can use the Internet to exchange information with others who have addressed similar problems and to gain access to networks specifically devoted to community policing and problem solving.

Responding to a Problem

After a problem has been clearly defined and analyzed, one confronts the ultimate challenge in problem-oriented policing: the search for the most effective way of dealing with it.[15]

The third stage of the SARA model focuses on developing and implementing effective responses to the problem. Before entering this stage, an agency must be sure it has thoroughly analyzed the problem. The temptation to implement a response and "start doing something" before analysis is complete is very strong. But quick fixes are rarely effective in the long-term. Problems will likely persist if solutions are not tailored to the specific causes of the problem.[16]

To develop tailored responses to crime problems, problem solvers should review their findings about the three sides of the crime triangle — victims, offenders and the crime location — and develop creative solutions that will address at least two sides of the triangle.[17] They should approach the development of solutions without any preconceived notions about what should be done. Often the results of the analysis phase point police and citizens in unexpected directions. For example, suppose the policing agency that faced the fast-food robbery problem described earlier found that:

- ✓ 14 delivery people were robbed over the past year;
- ✓ Nine of the robberies occurred between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights;
- ✓ Four of the fast-food delivery stores accounted for 10 of the robberies; staff working at two of these four stores experienced seven of the robberies;
- ✓ Staff at the two stores that were victimized the most deliver until 2:00 a.m., while the other two stores stop delivering at 12:00 a.m.;
- ✓ In seven of the robberies, police were unable to locate the ordering customer, indicating that orders were placed under false names or false addresses;
- ✓ Large outdoor parties, mostly attended by youth in their late teens, are held each weekend night in several common areas near residential units. The party areas are in the vicinity of the robberies. Alcohol is served at the parties, and there is some concern among residents about noise and underage drinking at the parties;
- ✓ Fast-food delivery staff recall that a number of the robberies were committed by teenagers who appeared to have been drinking;
- ✓ Several delivery staff also recall seeing or passing a group of teenage partiers on foot before they were robbed; and
- ✓ In 11 of the robberies, the offenders stole less than $40. In the other three robberies, between $40 and $60 was stolen.

A tailored response to this problem might include:

- An agreement by the two most victimized stores to stop delivery at midnight and require customers to pick up their take-out between midnight and 2:00 a.m.;

- An agreement by the stores to ask customers what bill denomination will be used to pay for the food, so that delivery people could carry the minimum amount of change required for the transaction. Exact change would be requested, but not required;

- An agreement by the stores to use an enhanced Caller ID system to cross-check customer names with telephone numbers. If the customer's name did not match the number and name of the caller displayed by Caller ID — possibly because the person placing the order was a guest of the residence — food store personnel would look up the resident's address to confirm that the telephone number matched the address. The resident would be called back to confirm the order;

- An agreement by the stores to implement a policy not to deliver an order if it means walking by a large crowd that is loitering in the area. If a delivery person is unable to deliver an order for this reason, the person will return to the store, call the customer and request that he or she meet the delivery person at the nearest curb past the loitering group; and

Often the results of the analysis phase point police and citizens in unexpected directions.

- An agreement by the resident who started the petition for food delivery service to the neighborhood to communicate the nature and reason for the new delivery policies (with the exception of the Caller ID check) to other residents. The petitioner would convey this information at a neighborhood meeting and through fliers delivered to each resident. At several of the teenage parties, residents would inform the youth in attendance that delivery people would no longer carry more than $10 in change (and often much less) at all times.

Bucking Tradition

From the outset, one is constantly battling a natural tendency to revert to traditional responses.[18]

Having relied on traditional responses (areawide sweeps or arrests, saturation patrol, etc.) in the past, it is only natural that policing agencies will gravitate toward these same tactics to address problems in the future — even if these tactics have not been especially effective or sustainable over the long-term.

For example, in the case of the fast-food robberies, it is easy to see how police might have decided to step up car or foot patrols in the problem area on weekend nights between the hours of 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. But this response would have been relatively costly to the police department effective. Creative responses that go beyond the criminal justice system and focus on preventing future occurrences are generally the most successful.

From the outset, one is constantly battling a natural tendency to revert to traditional responses.

Citizens and police are often tempted to implement programs or responses used in other communities. Although it can be very useful to learn how other communities have successfully addressed similar problems (and policing agencies are encouraged to research other approaches as part of their analysis), caution should be used in adopting off-the-shelf solutions, unless the situation is strikingly similar.[19]

For example, the police facing the fast-food robberies might have been inclined to suggest that public works increase

lighting in the problem area, because this is one of the ways other communities have successfully addressed robbery problems. But unless the robberies have occurred in areas that are dimly lit, this strategy probably would have little effect on the fast-food robbery problem.

*The key to developing tailored responses is making sure the responses are very focused and **directly linked** to the findings from the analysis phase of the project.*

Assessing the Impact on the Selected Problem

Over the past 20 years, it has become clear to many in policing that both the traditional approaches to addressing crime, fear and other problems and the measures of effectiveness have fallen short of many people's expectations. This has caused a significant number of police departments to seek new approaches to addressing old problems. It has also caused many police departments to ask whether their work really makes a difference beyond dealing with the immediate incident.[20]

Traditional Measures

A number of measures have traditionally been used by policing agencies and community members to assess effectiveness. These include numbers of arrests, levels of reported crime, response times, clearance rates, citizen complaints and various workload indicators, such as calls for service and the number of field interviews conducted.[21]

Several of these measures may be helpful to you in assessing the impact of a problem-solving effort, including calls for service related to the problem (especially a reduction in repeat calls for service involving specific locations, victims or offenders); changes in the incidence of reported crime; and changes in levels of citizen complaints. Other traditional measures, such as arrests and number of field interviews conducted, may not be that useful for your problem-solving effort, unless these measures can be directly linked to a long-term reduction in the harm associated with the targeted crime problem.

Even reductions in calls for service and citizen complaints may not be the best indicators of whether you are positively impacting a problem, because, in some instances, these measures may actually increase as the result of a problem-solving effort. In some cases, such an increase may be a good outcome, if it means that residents feel more comfortable filing complaints or believe their calls will be taken seriously. However, when a problem-solving effort does result in increased arrests or increased calls for service, policing agencies should look carefully at these outcomes. Were they the intended result of the initiative?

A Nontraditional Framework

Assessing the impact of a problem-solving effort may require using a nontraditional structure for determining effectiveness. One such framework developed by Eck and Spelman identifies five different levels or types of positive impact on problems. They are:[22]

1. Total elimination of the problem;
2. Fewer incidents;
3. Less serious or harmful incidents;
4. Better handling of the incidents/an improved response to the problem; and
5. Removing the problem from police consideration (shifting the handling to others more able to address the problem).

A sixth positive impact also has been suggested:

6. People and institutions affected by the problem are left better equipped to handle a similar problem in the future.[23]

A number of nontraditional measures will shed light on whether a problem has been impacted. These include the following suggested by Stephens and others: [24]

- Reduced instances of repeat victimization;

- Decreases in related crimes or incidents;

- Neighborhood indicators:
  - *Increased profits for legitimate businesses in target area*
  - *Increased usage of area/increased (or reduced) foot and vehicular traffic*
  - *Increased property values*
  - *Improved neighborhood appearance*
  - *Increased occupancy in problem buildings*
  - *Less loitering*
  - *Fewer abandoned cars*
  - *Less truancy;*

- Increased citizen satisfaction regarding the handling of the problem, which can be determined through surveys, interviews, focus groups, electronic bulletin boards, etc.; and

- Reduced citizen fear related to the problem.

Some of the measures listed above may be appropriate to your problem-solving effort. Others not listed above may be more appropriate. After you have analyzed the problem, you may wish to change the measures initially selected or revise the measures. (This is fine — just keep your grant advisor informed of these developments.) The measures you select will depend on the nature of the problem selected, preferences of the police and the community, and the ability of your jurisdiction to collect the necessary data both before the project begins and after it has been in place for some time.

The key is focusing on measures that demonstrate impact on the targeted problem.

Sample Measures that Demonstrate Impact on a Problem

- Four crack houses in the 12-block area were closed, and measurements indicated that there was no displacement of drug dealing in the surrounding five-block area. Calls for service relating to street-level drug dealing in the target area were reduced from an average of 45 per month to eight per month. The number of residents who reported witnessing drug deals during the previous month was reduced from 65 percent before the effort to 10 percent four months after the effort.

- Prior to the effort, 40 percent of those victimized twice by burglars were revictimized within a 6-month period. After the effort, only 14 percent were revictimized. Overall, burglaries in the targeted area were reduced from 68 in one year to 45 in the next.

- Because the problem-solving effort interrupted juvenile gun markets for more lethal semiautomatic firearms, the number and seriousness of injuries from drive-by shootings was significantly reduced, even though the number of drive-bys declined only slightly. Prior to the effort, there were 52 drive-by shootings in the city, 21 life-threatening injuries and five deaths. After the effort, there were 47 drive-by shootings, eight life-threatening injuries and no deaths.

Assessing the impact of a problem–solving effort may require using a nontraditional structure for determining effectiveness.

- In the year prior to the effort, police received an average of 50 complaints per month relating to disputes between neighbors. An average of 10 of the

monthly complaints were resolved by one visit from a police officer, but approximately 40 of the calls were placed by residents at 22 repeat problem locations. Since the effort was implemented, the department now receives an average of 12 complaints per month. Five repeat problem locations remain, but they account for less than 25 percent of the complaints received each month.

Sample Measures that Do Not Demonstrate Impact on a Crime or Disorder Problem

- ☒ Five police-community meetings were held over the course of the 1-year project. (Conclusions regarding the impact on the problem can't be drawn from this measure. If one goal of the project is to improve police understanding of community problems, a better measure would be whether residents perceived such an improvement as a result of the effort, which could be determined from pre- and post-effort surveys.)

- ☒ Officers conducted home security checks for 43 residents in the targeted housing development. (While it would be important to document the number of home security checks, it would be more important to know whether burglaries were reduced as a result of the initiative.)

- ☒ Officers and community members participated in a neighborhood cleanup and removed 150 pounds of trash. (This information doesn't necessarily indicate a reduction in levels of targeted crime or disorder problems, and a one-time cleanup may be a temporary improvement. It would be more important to show that the targeted crime and disorder problem was reduced as a result of, or in conjunction with, the cleanup.)

- ☒ Police seized over 10 kilos of cocaine during the initiative, which targeted narcotics activity in the southwest district. (This result doesn't indicate whether street-level drug sales and any associated problems – such as prostitution, loitering, graffiti, trash and intimidation of residents – were reduced.)

Adjust Responses Based on Assessment

If the responses implemented are not effective, the information gathered during analysis should be reviewed. New information may need to be collected before new solutions can be developed and tested. [25]

Sample Problem-Solving Initiatives

The COPS Office seeks to facilitate new, innovative problem-solving efforts tailored to an in-depth analysis of a locality's specific problem. Below are three examples* of the kinds of analytical efforts we hope to foster with School-Based Partnerships grant funds:

Example 1: Gainesville, FL[26]

Change in Evening Staffing Policies Reduces Robberies of Gainesville, FL, Convenience Stores by 82 percent

Scanning

In the spring of 1985, the city of Gainesville experienced what seemed to be an exceptionally large number of convenience store robberies.

Analysis

Because the police did not keep automated records specifically on convenience store crime at that time, department personnel manually searched through five year's worth of files to obtain more information about the problem. From this effort, the police determined that 45 of the 47 convenience stores located in Gainesville had been robbed at least once between 1981 and 1986. They also learned that although convenience stores accounted for only 18 percent of business establishments such as fast-food stores, motels/hotels, service stations and liquor stores, they accounted for 50 percent of business robberies. Many of the 45 convenience stores had been robbed repeatedly: nearly half had been robbed five or more times, and several had been robbed at least 10 times. The police also learned other important facts that provided them with insight into the conditions that facilitated the robberies.

They found that 75 percent of the convenience store robberies took place between the hours of 7 p.m. and 5 a.m., only one clerk was present in 92 percent of the robberies, and the robber waited until the clerk was alone in 85 percent of the robberies.

To obtain more information about the problem of convenience stores generally, Gainesville officials contacted the International City Managers Association, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National League of Cities, the National Association of Convenience Stores, the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, and several other national organizations. From these inquiries, they learned that several municipalities had passed ordinances requiring convenience stores to implement a variety of crime prevention policies. The effectiveness of these local laws varied. The most successful ordinance, adopted in Kent, Ohio, required the convenience industry to post two clerks in stores between the hours of 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. Three years after the Kent ordinance was passed, convenience store robberies in that community had decreased 74 percent.

To determine whether having two clerks on duty might prevent robberies in Gainesville, officials analyzed the robbery rates of two local stores that operated

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* These examples illustrate the use of the SARA model and feature responses that are linked to comprehensive problem analyses. The COPS Office is not promoting a particular set of responses to problems and acknowledges that there is room for disagreement regarding the responses selected and their relative impact.

within 100 yards of each other but had different staffing policies. They found that the store that consistently had two clerks on duty on a 24-hour basis had never been robbed, while the competing store, which was always staffed by only one clerk, had been robbed 11 times. The Gainesville police chief then asked a researcher at the University of Florida to corroborate the department's conclusions about convenience store robberies in Gainesville. From interviews with 65 convenience store robbers imprisoned in Florida, the researcher confirmed that one of the most desirable characteristics of a potential robbery site was that only one clerk would be on duty. (The only characteristic rated more desirable was "easy access/getaway" to and from the robbery site.)

Officials found that the store that consistently had two clerks on duty on a 24-hour basis had never been robbed...

Response

Following their analysis of the problem, Gainesville city officials worked with representatives of the convenience store industry for approximately one year to institute policies that would reduce the robberies. During this period, the industry suggested developing voluntary compliance crime prevention policies, but these policies did not materialize. In particular, the convenience store industry resisted instituting a two-clerk policy. Two public hearings were held by the city to gain community input on how the problem should be addressed. In July 1986, the Gainesville City Commission passed an ordinance that required stores to provide a clear outside view of their cash register areas, post large signs informing customers that stores used drop safes and limited the cash available to clerks, and train employees who work evening shifts in robbery prevention. At the request of the convenience story industry, a two-clerk policy was not mandated by the law. Rather, a resolution was attached to the legislation stipulating that unless the convenience store industry could reduce robberies at least 50 percent during the 240 days following passage of the law, a two-clerk requirement would be imposed. Convenience store robberies increased 130 percent during the next 240 days, and the two-clerk policy was implemented in Gainesville in the spring of 1987.

Assessment

Robberies of Gainesville convenience stores declined 82 percent between 1986, when there were 61 robberies, and 1993, when there were 11. The number of serious injuries related to convenience store robberies also was greatly reduced. Between 1981 and 1986, there was one homicide and 18 serious injuries; between 1987 and 1993, there were no homicides and only one serious injury.

...while the competing store, which was always staffed by only one clerk, had been robbed 11 times.

Example 2: Mankato, MN [27]

Minnesota Police Reclaim Park for Use by Law-abiding Citizens

Scanning

A park in Mankato, Minnesota, had become a popular gathering, drinking and socializing spot for a group of car devotees who called themselves "Motorheads." Motorhead parties in the park began each day around noon and would draw 300 to 400 people by 10 p.m. Party-goers were unruly and tormented other park users — typically citizens who gathered for reunions or games at the park's baseball diamond, although these activities occurred less and less. The Motorhead parties were linked to a number of problems, including assaults, public and juvenile drinking, public urination, suspected drug dealing, and $15,000 worth of criminal property damage to the park over several years. To respond to the problem, police tried a number of approaches, none of which worked very well. These approaches included police park patrols, the installation of flood lights in the party area and the scheduling of a large number of non-party events at the park.

Analysis

The police then decided to take a more analytical approach to the disorder problem in the park. Officers spent several weeks watching and then interacting with members of the party group. Once the party-goers were comfortable with the officers, the officers interviewed members of the group to learn why they gathered in the park and congregated in one particular area. The officers learned that the party-goers liked the spot because it was out of sight, had two exits, contained a large parking lot in which they could drive around, and allowed them to see the police coming from a distance. Officers then interviewed other park users to find out why they no longer used the party-goers' area. They learned that the other park users were intimidated by the party group. An analysis of park usage figures confirmed that no one but the party-goers used the area. The officers then hosted a community meeting to elicit additional information about the problem.

Response

The officers worked with the city parks director to develop a long-term solution to the problem. Sensing that the party-goers would not use the park for rowdy socializing if the area was less appealing to them, the police and parks officials decided to reduce the size of the massive parking lot and restrict the flow of traffic to one way, so that traffic safety in the lot would improve. The officers then worked with city engineers to draw up the proposed changes and obtain the necessary authorizations. At the same time, the officers located an empty downtown parking lot near the police department for the party group. The lot could easily be monitored by the police.

Assessment

The Motorheads stopped gathering in the park when the environmental changes were made to the parking lot. Once the Motorheads moved downtown, young families began using all areas of the park again. The new Motorhead lot downtown was fairly isolated — only a supermarket was nearby — so the partiers did not generally bother others in the area. However, there was some displacement of Motorhead-related juvenile drinking, narcotics sales and reckless driving problems to the downtown lot area. To address these problems, the police conducted several targeted enforcement efforts. The

Motorheads realized that they would not be able to keep the downtown lot unless the problem behavior stopped. At that point, the group agreed to self-police its activities, and the behavior of the group is now within acceptable levels.

Example 3: Redmond, WA [28]

Collaborative Effort Between Teenagers and Police Reduces Graffiti Complaints 96 percent in Redmond, Washington

Scanning

In early 1993, Redmond, Washington, a Seattle suburb, faced a citywide graffiti problem that threatened to overwhelm the community. The 42,000 residents of the city were filing more than 60 complaints of graffiti each month. At first, police officers implemented traditional approaches to the graffiti problem; they established organized cleanup procedures and stepped up enforcement patrols in areas that had a lot of graffiti. These strategies did not impact the problem, however.

Analysis

Looking for different approaches, the officers interviewed a number of youths whom they believed were associated with the graffiti. From these discussions, they learned that most of those responsible for Redmond's graffiti blight — unlike known offenders in other areas — considered the vandalism a form of hip-hop art. Initially, the officers questioned the youths' assertion that the graffiti was a form of self-expression, believing it to be perpetrated by gang members. But after an officer analyzed the department's case reports and researched the problem of graffiti in general (by reading popular literature on graffiti and consulting other information sources), it became clear to him that the Redmond problem did not involve gangs. One indicator that the graffiti was not perpetrated by gang members was that the content of the graffiti in Redmond was not generally violent, whereas graffiti perpetrated by gangs in other cities sometimes included code references to murder and other violent acts.

Looking for different approaches, the officers interviewed a number of youths whom they believed were associated with the graffiti.

Response

Consequently, the officer met with the teenage taggers in the hopes of developing a solution to the problem. Rather than be subjected to increased enforcement, the teenagers suggested establishing a legal place to paint in return for a tagging cease-fire. The officer helped the taggers obtain permission from the city council to erect a graffiti wall and worked with the taggers to obtain donations from local businesses for materials needed to construct it.

Assessment

Since the wall was constructed, citizen complaints about graffiti have decreased from more than 60 per month to an average of four per month.

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**Can be obtained through the National Criminal Justice Reference Service by calling (800)-851-3420. Some publications may have a fee.*

♦Can be obtained free of charge from the Home Office Police Department, Police Research Group, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1H 9AT; Fax: 0171 273 4001.

End Notes

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